

CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH (Central Missionary Baptist Church)
515 North Fourth Street
Muskogee
Muskogee County
Oklahoma

HABS No. OK-44

HABS
OKLA,
51-musk
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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

U.S.G.S. TOPOGRAPHIC MAP

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH (Central Missionary Baptist Church) HABS No. OK-44

Location: 515 North Fondulac Street; Muskogee;
Muskogee County, Oklahoma

USGS Northeast Muskogee, OK Quadrangle;
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates
15.285720.3958990

Present Owner: Muskogee Urban Renewal Authority
P. O. Box 1927
Muskogee, OK 74402

Present Use: Vacant. To be demolished June-July 1985 for
construction of a regional downtown shopping
mall.

Significance: The Central Baptist Church is the second oldest
black Baptist church in Muskogee having been
constructed in 1908, one year after Oklahoma
became a state. It is one of the three oldest
social institutions in Muskogee's black community.

Central Baptist Church served the spiritual and
social needs of Muskogee's black community for
77 years. It was last used by the congrega-
tion for religious services on Sunday, March 31,
1985.

Part I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

(NOTE: This description and the information above is updated and adapted from
NPS Form 10-900 National Register of Historic Places, Inventory Nomination
Form for Black Protestant Churches of Muskogee, dated February, 1984.)

From its founding in 1872, Muskogee quickly developed as the major
urban center of Indian Territory. With suitable soil for cotton production,
the town soon emerged as a principle trading, storage, and processing center
for cotton producers. Muskogee also became a major rail center for Indian

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Territory as three railroads laid tracks through the town during the period from 1872 to 1885. In 1904, oil and gas fields were opened in the surrounding area and one of Indian Territory's first petroleum refineries was completed in Muskogee shortly thereafter. By 1910, there were six railroads with fourteen passenger trains daily and Muskogee became division headquarters for the Katy, Missouri Southern, Muskogee Union, and the Pullman railroad companies. Muskogee boasted three cotton gins, a cotton compress, a vitrified brick plant, a concrete block plant, two daily and four weekly newspapers.

These facilities helped Muskogee's population to boom. In 1910 the City's population had reached 25,275, and it was the second largest city in the new state of Oklahoma, exceeded only by Oklahoma City.

The industrial and commercial growth of Muskogee made it an attractive urban center for black migrants seeking employment, especially those who were living in the rural areas of eastern Oklahoma. Historically, the black population of Oklahoma had been concentrated in old Indian Territory because the black freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes had settled there following the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. A majority of the all-black towns, a movement of the 1890s and early 1900s, had also been established in that area.

Muskogee's 25,278 population in 1910 consisted of 7,831 black people — 31 percent of the population. Its thriving black community had a business district which included several retail stores, physicians' and attorneys' offices, a bank, and a newspaper, the Muskogee Cimeter. Black residential and commercial development was accompanied by the establishment of social institutions including schools, fraternal organizations, and churches.

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Organized religion among black people in Indian Territory dates to the 1830s when the Five Civilized Tribes brought black slaves from the southeastern United States. The most active denominations among black people in Indian Territory were the Baptists and Methodists who undertook successful missionary work in the region.

Built in 1908, the year after Oklahoma became a state, the Central Baptist Church is representative of the one social institution in their lives—religion—over which black people had significant control. The churches, as a result, exerted a powerful influence within Muskogee's black community. They served as central points to which their members could turn for spiritual inspiration and at least temporary escape from secular problems. By providing opportunities for education, expression, recognition—and perhaps most important—leadership, the churches proved to be vehicles for advancement in a segregated society.

Central Baptist Church was the second black Baptist church in Muskogee and the third black Protestant church overall. It was built to serve Muskogee's growing black community which numbered approximately 7,000 people by 1910. It reflected the fact that black people in Oklahoma were overwhelmingly affiliated with the Baptist denomination.

(NOTE: The following information was obtained from Beatrice C. H. Compassi in an interview conducted by Joseph L. Marsan of the Muskogee Urban Renewal Authority, on May 20, 1985. Ms. Compassi, age 75 years, has been an active member of the Central Baptist Church for 56 years, having moved to Muskogee in 1927 from Eufaula, Oklahoma. Her information concerning early events in the

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Church's history was obtained in an interview she conducted with Ms. L. B. Burton, the last surviving charter member of the Church. The interview reportedly occurred circa. 1950 shortly before Ms. Burton's death.)

The Central Baptist Church was organized in the fall of 1901 with eight members.

A wood-frame church occupied the site prior to the brick church's construction in 1908.

The Church's first pastor was Reverend F. K. White who served two (separated in time) terms as pastor.

In its eighty-four year history, the church has had twelve ministers.

The present pastor is Reverend James White.

The present membership in the church is approximately one-hundred and eighty. At its peak, the congregation numbered approximately five-hundred members.

The congregation is meeting at a temporary location and is building a new church at the corner of Georgetown and Fourteenth Streets in Muskogee.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION:

(NOTE: This description is updated and adapted from NPS Form 10-900 cited above.)

The Central Baptist Church is a 40' x 95', one-story, detached, religious building situated in the northern part of the City of Muskogee, Oklahoma. The building has a hipped roof with a lower cross gable, and is intersected by two, two-story towers at the east end. The rear section of the

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building has a flat roof with a stepped parapet wall. The main body of the building is constructed of red brick laid in the running bond with a header course every seventh row. The rear section is constructed of concrete blocks. There are four single stack, red brick, interior chimneys in the building.

The front, or east side, of the building has a tower in both the northeast and southeast corners. The former has a tent roof with a bell-like flare. The first story of this tower has a metal door set in a wooden frame, with a single transom light and segmented wooden arch above. There are two, double-hung, 1/1, sash windows on the north side of the tower. These first floor windows have ashlar sills and brick, soldier laid, semielliptical arches above. The second story of this tower has two wooden window frames with semielliptical brick arches on both the north and east sides. The openings are covered with louvered windows. The second tower on the east side has a battlement wall at the top. The entrance door is a double, wooden framed one of panelled construction, with two transom lights and a semielliptical brick arch above. There are two, 1/1, double hung sash windows with wooden frames, ashlar sills and brick arches on the south side of the tower. The second story of the tower has four wooden window frames with semielliptical brick arches. The openings, two on the east and two on the south side, are covered with louvered windows. The central section between the two towers has three wooden framed windows with ashlar sills and semielliptical brick arches above. Two of the windows have 2/2 lights, the other has 4/4 lights. All these windows are of the double-hung, sash-type. In the gable of this side of the building, is a circular arrangement of rowlock laid bricks which could possibly have contained a porthole window, but is now bricked in.

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The north and south sides of the building are constructed in a similar fashion. Under the gable roof section there are five wooden framed, 1/1, double-hung sash windows with ashlar sills and semielliptical brick arches above. One of the windows on the south side has 4/4 lights. There is a wooden ventilator grille located in the intersecting gable. The concrete block section has four windows and a door on each side, north and south. The windows have wooden frames, with 1/1 lights and are of the double-hung, sash-type. The door has a wooden frame.

The rear or west end of the building has a wooden panelled central entrance door. Either side of this is a wooden window frame which has been filled in with wooden boards.

In the mid 1950s, a 34' x 34', one-story addition was completed to the rear of the property. Constructed of concrete blocks, the addition does detract from the church's architectural integrity. However, because of its location it is not visible from the facade. The original building has remained intact for over 75 years.

Part III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

NPS FORM 10-900 National Register of Historic Places, Inventory Nomination Form for Black Protestant Churches of Muskogee, dated February, 1984.

Part IV. PROJECT INFORMATION:

This report is sponsored by the Muskogee Urban Renewal Authority. The survey narrative was prepared by Joseph L. Marsan, Development Manager of the

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Authority. Photography was produced by Benjamin Warner Newby of Tulsa,
Oklahoma.

Prepared by:

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Muskogee Urban Renewal Authority
Muskogee, Oklahoma
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